

# ERRATUM

Ibn Taymiyyah on  
Creation ex Materia

الخلق والافناء

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

# ERRATUM

## IBN TAYMIYYAH ON CREATION EX MATERIA

This erratum contains important corrections for the first print of the recently published book "Ibn Taymiyyah on Creation ex Materia". I apologize for any inconvenience caused by these errors.

The erratum is followed by the full text of the last section of the introduction, with two sentences that have been edited and underlined for clarity. All changes will be incorporated into the second print of the book, insha'Allah.

Mohammad Abu AbdurRahman

The translator

22/04/2023

*Ḥudūth al-ʿĀlam* is a unique text because it provides a rare insight into Ibn Taymiyyah's early position on the question of whether the existence of materials is a necessary condition for the origination of created beings. Ibn Taymiyyah claims in *Ḥudūth al-ʿĀlam* that ~~the materials are superfluous~~. God is able to create with or without prior materials: *The compound substances originate from simpler elements which in turn originate ex nihilo*. He objects to the soundness of Aristotle's argument for the eternity of the matter substrate, implying that further evidence must be provided in order to justify the position that creation without materials is impossible. Nevertheless, Ibn Taymiyyah suggests

has been perpetually acting from eternity by His will. Ibn Taymiyyah also suggests in *Ḥudūth al-ʿĀlam* as he does in *Nubuwwāt* that the evidence for God's creative agency lies in the contingency of the world and in everyday observations of the substantial origination of things ex materia. For Ibn Taymiyyah, the question on the plausibility of creation without prior materials is largely irrelevant when it comes to the rational demonstration of Abrahamic monotheism. However, as evidenced by *Ḥudūth al-ʿĀlam*, Ibn Taymiyyah did believe at some point in his life (perhaps mistakenly) that the impossibility of creating ~~things~~ *the basic elements* without materials would contradict God's independence in His acts of creation, and that therefore such an impossibility is indemonstrable. *later*

الطَّرِيقَةُ؛ كَذَمَّ الشَّافِعِيُّ لِحَفْصِ الْفَرْدِ، الَّذِي كَانَ عَلَى قَوْلِ ضِرَارِ بْنِ  
عَمْرٍو، وَذَمَّ أَحْمَدَ بْنَ حَنْبَلٍ لِأَبِي عَيْسَى مُحَمَّدَ بْنَ عَيْسَى بَرْغُوثَ، الَّذِي  
كَانَ عَلَى قَوْلِ حُسَيْنِ النَّجَّارِ. وَذَمَّهُمَا وَذَمَّ أَبِي يُوسُفَ وَمَالِكٌ وَغَيْرُهُمْ  
لَأَمْثَالِ هَؤُلَاءِ الَّذِينَ سَلَكَوا هَذِهِ الطَّرِيقَةَ.

And it is known that it is unnecessary for <sup>[each and every thing]</sup> ~~the things~~ which God originates to have [come from prior] matter.\* For God makes the eternal [existents] without [prior] matter according to their opinion. Thus, it is known that God alone is independent of materials in His causing of whatever He makes. He independently makes the higher, more perfect [existent], and so how can He not independently make the lower, less perfect [existent]?!

**His greatness.** For He, glorified is He, does not have a partner in His Sovereignty – neither matter nor anything besides matter – that

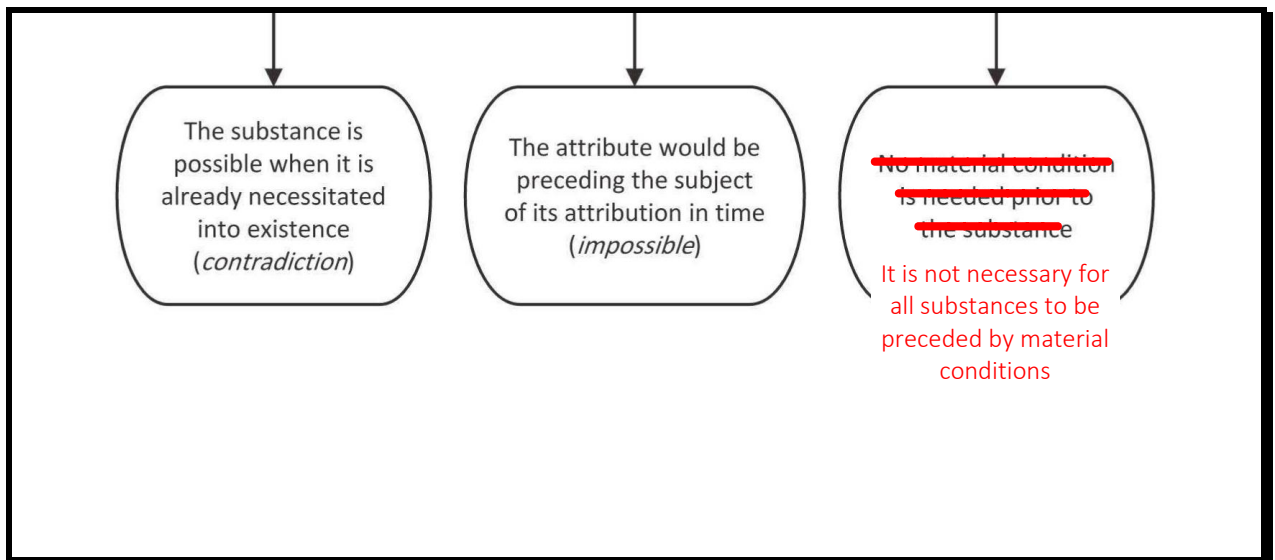
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\* Ibn Taymiyyah is not arguing here for the incoherent notion of "superfluous materials". Rather, he is saying that 254 the simple elements are originated ex nihilo, unlike the compound substances which must be preceded by material conditions. [*Bayān Talbīs al-Jahmiyyah*, Vol 2, pp. 275-276].

This is clarified by the fact that the [temporal] precedence of the agent with regards to its effect is well-established in [both] reason and sense perception, even though it does not require the testimony of sense perception [to be accepted]; [this is] even when the agent is assumed to be ontologically prior [to its effect]. [However,] this is unlike [the belief] that ~~all~~<sup>[all]</sup> effects or originated things must have [come from] matter. For this [latter statement] is not known by reason. The misconception of the one who claims [this position] only [arises] because his observation was limited to things which originate in this way [i.e. out of matter]. [So] how can a statement known by [both] reason and sense perception [ever] be equated with a state-

And it is known that the reality of their [cosmological] assumptions is that an infinite regress of successive events is proceeding from an eternal complete Cause. They then claim that the ~~complete~~ cause [for these successive events] is the motion of the ninth celestial sphere [that is above the rest of the world]<sup>248</sup>. [But] their claim is most self-contradicting. For the ninth [sphere] is not the ~~[complete]~~ cause [for the motions below it]. Rather, each [one of the lower] spheres has a distinct motion that is not determined by the motion

And the eighth celestial sphere [is a starry sphere that] has an enormous number of stars, requiring explanations as many [as their number]. But the starless, [ninth] sphere [that rotates] above it is **simple**, and multiplicity cannot proceed from it [at all]. [Indeed,] there must be [many] reasons for the multiplicity [of existents in the contingent world below the ninth sphere, which this sphere cannot account for]. And this is one of the conundrums that spoils their claim, <sup>So,</sup> ~~for~~ [the reality of their claim is that] **diverse** motions have proceeded from **eternal complete causes**, [in turn] proceeding from an **eternal complete Cause**.



# INTRODUCTION

FULL TEXT OF  
THE LAST SECTION



## Overview of the Third Translation

The final part of the book includes a supplementary translation of a selected passage from Ibn Taymiyyah's work *Ḥudūth al-ʿĀlam*, which argues for the origination of the world and responds to philosophical arguments for the eternity of the world and its celestial spheres. In *Ḥudūth al-ʿĀlam* [pp. 56-69], Ibn Taymiyyah identifies two lines of argumentation for the eternity of the world. The first is an Aristotelian line of argumentation that seeks to demonstrate the eternity of a matter substrate, and is usually reinforced by inductive arguments. The second is an Avicennian line of argumentation which states that God does not have any willful acts of creation, but that He is instead an eternally complete Cause for the world who emanates it by His essence, such that the celestial spheres must have co-existed with Him from eternity. The full translation of Ibn Taymiyyah's response to the first line of argumentation is presented in this book.

*Ḥudūth al-ʿĀlam* is a unique text because it provides a rare insight into Ibn Taymiyyah's early position on the question of whether the existence of materials is a necessary condition for the origination of created beings. Ibn Taymiyyah claims in *Ḥudūth al-ʿĀlam* that God is able to create with or without prior materials: The compound substances originate from simpler elements which in turn originate ex nihilo. He objects to the soundness of Aristotle's argument for the eternity of the matter substrate, implying that further evidence must be provided in order to justify the position that creation without materials is

impossible. Nevertheless, Ibn Taymiyyah suggests that Aristotle's argument does not lead to an eternal substrate even if it were true, explaining that the creations are known to originate entirely and substantially out of others, a position that is consistent with his definition of origination elsewhere.

However, in *Nubuwwāt*, Ibn Taymiyyah argues for a different position that the materials are necessary conditions for the origination of the next iteration of creatures: God may create things only out of prior materials which are in turn created only out of prior materials. The omnipotence of God cannot be said to include acts of ex nihilo creation, as such acts are incoherent and self-contradictory propositions that cannot be attributed to God in any meaningful sense. In this view, God's creative act is the sufficient cause that is needed to bring the created effect into actual existence from the prior material condition in which it is latent. God originates the created effect only after preparing its material conditions. Ibn Taymiyyah explains his rational argument for this theological position (presented at the end of the first translation), which has its roots in Aristotle's argument.

The conflicting positions in *Ḥudūth al-ʿĀlam* and *Nubuwwāt* is one example that supports the known development of Ibn Taymiyyah's position on aspects of philosophy that occurred later in his life. *Ḥudūth al-ʿĀlam* most likely predates *Nubuwwāt* with the latter being one of the last major works of Ibn Taymiyyah.

It should be noted that the transition in Ibn Taymiyyah's position regarding the material conditions does not affect his arguments for the origination of the world or his general understanding of the way God originates things after their nonexistence. These arguments remain consistent between his earlier and latter works. Ibn Taymiyyah argues in *Ḥudūth al-ʿĀlam*, as he does in his other books, that God has been perpetually acting from eternity by His will. Ibn Taymiyyah also

suggests in *Hudūth al-‘Ālam* as he does in *Nubuwwāt* that the evidence for God’s creative agency lies in the contingency of the world and in everyday observations of the substantial origination of things ex materia. For Ibn Taymiyyah, the question on the plausibility of creation without prior materials is largely irrelevant when it comes to the rational demonstration of Abrahamic monotheism. However, as evidenced by *Hudūth al-‘Ālam*, Ibn Taymiyyah did believe at some point in his life (perhaps mistakenly) that the impossibility of creating the basic elements without materials would contradict God’s independence in His later acts of creation, and that therefore such an impossibility is indemonstrable.

The evolution of Ibn Taymiyyah’s position on the question of material conditions is an interesting observation with modern-day implications. The Shaykh of Islam Ibn Taymiyyah, one of the greatest exegetes of Islamic Scripture and a proponent of orthodox Islamic theology, was able to reconcile the impossibility of creation ex nihilo with an uncompromising belief in the absolute independence and maximal perfection of the God of Abraham. In the same way, it may also be possible to reconcile Abrahamic monotheism with modern-day sentiments in support of the necessity of the laws of physics, such as the laws of motion and energy conservation. Perhaps it is unnecessary for the naturalists of this age to sacrifice these philosophical commitments in order for their faith in God to find its proper expression. Perhaps they only need to see this world with sharper philosophical insight in the brighter light of God’s Revelation.

<https://www.daral-arqam.co.uk/product/ibn-taymiyyah-on-creation-ex-materia>



Ibn Taymiyyah on  
Creation ex Materia

فَصْلَانِ مِنَ النُّبُوءَاتِ وَيَأْنِ تَلْيِيسِ الْجَهْمِيَّةِ  
لِشَيْخِ الْإِسْلَامِ تَقِي الدِّينِ ابْنِ تَيْمِيَّةَ

الْخَلْقُ وَالْإِفْتَاءُ

Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥalīm al-Ḥarrānī



# الخلق والإفناء

This book is the second in an envisioned series of translations from Ibn Taymiyyah's theological works that cover a wide range of topics from the evidences of God's perfection to the signs of Prophethood, and from the meaning of God's creative agency to the compatibility of divine predestination with human moral agency. The series aims to provide readers from the English-speaking world access to Ibn Taymiyyah's articulations of these important matters of the Faith in an effort to demonstrate the superior rationality embodied in Islamic Faith over the conflicting claims of rationality offered by other religions, philosophies and theological positions.

Such an English series is much needed nowadays, especially in response to current challenges posed by growing trends of atheism. Ibn Taymiyyah's exceptional insight and distinguished explanations of Qur'anic arguments have helped many Muslims remain intellectually satisfied in the face of doubts and challenges presented by competing world views.

In *Bayān Talbīs al-Jahmiyyah*, Ibn Taymiyyah provides a rational argument against the philosophical position that creation ex materia is necessarily a rearrangement of already existing matter. In his other work *Kitāb al-Nubuwwāt*, he promotes a more scriptural definition of creation ex materia that involves the origination of substances in place of other substances. The concept is very similar to ex nihilo creation but with the subtle difference that the substantial origination must be accompanied by the annihilation of a prior material that carries the potential for that origination. This intuitive conception implies that the creations come into actual existence out of prior material conditions that cease to exist entirely, allowing Ibn Taymiyyah to successfully argue for the eternal Originator using direct empirical observations of animals and trees without any need to commit to the further assertion that this world was originated ex nihilo in the unobservable past.

